A.B.M.D.I. News

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Inside this Issue:

NamUs Never Sleeps	2
Benefit of Partnering with NamUs	4
Assistance with Entering Cases	6
NamUs Assisted ID	7
Did You Know?	9
Achieving Success through NamUs	10
Continuing Ed	11
Identifying the Unidentified	12
Featured Certificants	14
Best Practices:	16

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Message from the President

John Kraemer, F-ABMDI

I would like to highlilght the health and growth of the ABMDI. Current statistics show:

-As of April 1, 2012 there are 1,499 Registry and Board Certified certificants. Of this total, 1,325 certificants are Registry Certified and 174 certificants are Board certified.

-Within the previous calendar year, 162 individuals applied for and took certification exams and 150 of these individuals gained certification status.

-Thirty-eight individuals also re-certified during the same time period.

-The ABMDI has scheduled 55 certification exams since the beginning of 2012..

-Thus far, the ABMDI has certified medicolegal death investigators in the following countries/ territories outside the fifty U.S. states: Canada, Pakistan, Puerto Rico and Sri Lanka.

In comparison, April of 2011 statistics revealed:

-The ABMDI had a total of 1,370 ABMDI certified medicolegal death investigators, of which 1,200 were Registry Certified and 170 were Board Certified.

-Thirty-eight individuals re-certified that year.

-One-hundred-twenty individuals took the Registry Exam with 117 individuals gaining certification status.

-Eleven individuals took the Board Exam and 10 passed.

-Twenty-five individuals let their certifications expire due to retirement, job loss, and failure to meet re-certification requirements or failure to pay annual certification maintenance fees.

In summary, over the past year we have seen an increase in certification (129 new certificants) and an increase in those applying to become certified (31 more applications received than last year at this time). I know this is just a quick and broad glimpse statistically of the status of ABMDI certification; however, these statistics show that nationally more and more medicolegal jurisdictions and professionals themselves are recognizing the importance and value of certification based upon the varied geographical distribution from applying jurisdictions.

Both Vicky Goelzhauser and Julie Howe have been working diligently processing certification applications, scheduling exams, processing re-certification applications and the associated continuing education materials as well as addressing a myriad of other daily tasks and responsibilities to assist people in becoming certified and re-certified ABMDI medicolegal death investigators. I am sure you will agree with me in saying that their hard work is greatly appreciated in helping us achieve and/or maintain our certifications.

I ask all of you to reach out to your fellow colleagues, encourage them to apply for certification and share with them the benefits of achieving the status of being a ABMDI certified medicolegal death investigator.

NamUs Never Sleeps

As an investigator, how productive could you be if you never got tired, never forgot case details, could compare facts and figures flawlessly, and had open communication with thousands of other investigators (public and private) across the county, even the ones you don't really care to talk with? Unreal, yes - unrealistic, no. The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs, which consists of three databases: NamUs-MP [Missing Persons], NamUs-UP [Unidentified Persons] and NamUs-UC [Unclaimed Persons]) eliminates many problems associated with downtime and human error (e.g., fact-checking and across-agency communication) by leveraging what successful online computing is known for: storing, comparing and sharing data painlessly. Designed to be "accessible" and "user-managed," NamUs collects information by following simple data entry rules; "rules" based largely on "textbook" MP/UP investigative procedure, resulting in a logical, straight-forward system any "investigator" can use (i.e., Bank of America meets Facebook.)

NamUs has some unique advantages over other on-line investigative "tools;" 1) NamUs receives all UP data from verified primary source users (medical examiners, corners and Justice of the Peace [ME/C/JP]) or their designees and MP data from verified law enforcement and public users and 2) NamUs is actually a "data system" which processes information using algorithms developed again, using "textbook" investigative logic and accepted forensic science practice. For example, a UP discovered in 2011 and estimated to be 20-30 years old can be excluded as "the" missing person born in 1952. NamUs is the electronic investigator who is "working" 24/7, and does math.

Like all data systems, NamUs is only as good as the data in it. NamUs attempts to avoid the pitfalls associated with extraneous/garbage data in two simple ways, 1) limiting the number of data fields and 2) respecting the user. All investigators can site a case that "masqueraded" as something it was not, but those are rare and were not considered useful in the system's design. Therefore, only "essential information" fields are available and limiting the ability to enter and edit cases to those who have the motivation to "get it right" provides true ownership to those case owners, plus the "proofreading" assistance of thousands. In addition, NamUs (funded by the National Institute of Justice and administrated from the University of North Texas) has a dedicated staff which includes eight regional system administrators (RSA) scattered throughout the county that verify and assist users - specifically MP users as the MP case volume is significantly higher then UP volume.

Since readers of this article will primarily be medicolegal death investigators, I'd like to chronicle the UP case review and publication process in a "narrative" form. Hopefully, this will help the reader describe the NamUs process to other investigators. Early every morning, Dr. Randy Hanzlick turns on his computer and logs into the only "publicly" searchable database for the unidentified dead in the United States, NamUs. Specifically NamUs-UP (unidentified persons), which currently houses data on nearly nine thousand deceased individuals found in the US that after the results of local agency investigation(s) prove negative, remain unidentified. Because NamUs is a "live" system, cases and case information change constantly, so each morning Dr. Hanzlick reviews and publishes (activate cases "live" on NamUs) all newly submitted UP cases from medical examiner and coroner (ME/C) offices across the county. Checking investigative photographs for "inappropriateness" (i.e., you know it when you see it), checking for correct "categorization" of images (i.e., facial ID photo, clothing, jewelry, etc.), reading discovery circumstances, textbox descriptions and generally making sure the case "makes sense." All are critical to both manual searching conducted by users and the internal auto-searches run each time the "save" button is clicked. The most notable auto-search, being the "possible matches" search is run against its "sister" system NamUs-MP (missing persons.)

This may seem like an overwhelming task for one person, given over half of the US population is served by ME/C offices that routinely uses NamUs. But the identification of decedents is an activity medicolegal investigators take very seriously, identifying most individuals within hours of discovery, and rarely having cases that remain unidentified beyond 30 days. This results in a manageable average of three or four "new" unidentified cases daily and (depending on local resources) another dozen or so submissions of what are commonly considered "cold" cases, or "changes" to existing cases already in the system, which are also reviewed before going "live." In addition, case "entry" privileges are limited to

medicolegal officers (ME/C/JP) or their designees which makes verification of cases easier.

Timely review and publication ensures broad-based distribution of case information to a growing internet community of NamUs "users" who review cases daily. By harnessing the power of the public (over half a million people visit NamUs annually), NamUs has "assisted" in the identification of 87 individuals since 2008. NamUs doesn't "identify" people, people identify people; meaning NamUs is simply an investigative tool for "investigators" (public and private) to use in their quest for answers about unidentified and missing persons.

What NamUs is quickly becoming known for, is a system with powerful search capabilities with functions that allow users to construct and save custom searches looking for the smallest details in a case. From a single missing tooth - to Nike sneakers, if the data was entered, you can search for it. Complex searches can be saved and rerun periodically, as new cases are entering the system daily. One Nevada medicolegal death investigator constructed and saved a complicated search called "payday," which he runs - you guessed it - every payday, in hopes of "matching" a newly entered MP case.

With accurate data entry, investigative leg-work and your tireless electronic assistant, "payday" is just around the corner!

Steven Clark, Ph.D.
Occupational Research and Assessment
Grand Rapids, MI

Recertification: A Review of Requirements

The ABMDI sends a letter approximately four to six months prior to an individual's recertification date notifying them to gather their documentation and submit it for review. Information submitted should include 1) documentation of 45-hours of approved continuing education, 2) signed current Ethics Statement and 3) notarized Work Verification Form or proof of current competency if you are not currently employed by a medical examiner/coroner office or military equivalent.

Current competency shows that you are active in the field of medicolegal death investigation and is a requirement of ABMDI accreditation by the Forensic Specialties Accreditation Board.

A continuing education folder is sent to certificants when they receive their certification and certificant wallet size card. Certificants should be documenting their continuing education in the folder as they attend training and receive certificates. If the continuing education folder is misplaced, it can be downloaded in the form of a .pdf file from the ABMDI website at http://medschool.slu.edu/abmdi/index.php?page=recertification

Time gets away from us, and the next thing you know your deadline is quickly upon you. Please make the process easier on yourself by maintaining your continuing education packets and reviewing the materials periodically to ensure you will have enough approved continuing education when the time comes. Five years may seem like a long time to obtain the required 45 credit hours, but it can go by quickly. So, do not wait until the fifth year to start looking for opportunities. Contact the ABMDI office if you have questions ***before*** attending a training course (approval for courses cannot be granted after the fact.)

Continuing education credits can be accumulated by teaching (maximum of 5 hours), participating in a leadership activity, publishing articles or attending approved conferences. ABMDI accepts continuing education from courses that are accredited by the American Nursing Association, the American Bar Association, Peace Officer Standards Training, EMS, and post secondary institutions recognized by national educational accrediting agencies.

Certification is valuable as it shows that you have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform the duties of a medicolegal death investigator, and it increases the level of professionalism in our field.

The Retention Committee is currently contacting certificants to offer assistance to those who are due to recertify in 2012. However, we are happy to provide guidance to anyone regardless of where you are in process. The committee consists of the following so feel free to contact us at any time:

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Benefit of Partnering with NamUs

The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) is a national centralized repository and resource center for missing persons and unidentified decedent records. NamUs (www.namus.gov) is a free online system that can be searched by medical examiners, coroners, law enforcement officials and the general public in hopes of resolving cases. The missing persons' database currently contains 7,148 entries while the unidentified persons' database has 7,855 records. The recent case below highlights the importance of a comprehensive law enforcement investigation into a missing person case and the significance of utilizing NamUs.

Brittany Nicole Peart was a 21 year-old Caucasian female when she went missing from her home in Elkton, Maryland on July 25, 2008. Initially, she was not reported as a missing person since she left her home voluntarily following a dispute with her mother. She was listed as a missing person on September 27, 2008 and was allegedly seen with an acquaintance in December of that year not far from her home. No further contact was made and no additional information was identified that would lead to the cause of her disappearance or her possible location. The Maryland State Police conducted a meticulous investigation into Brittany's disappearance, which included gathering her medical and dental records along with a familial DNA sample. The data was compiled into a case file and entered into the NamUs Missing Persons database. Over the next several years law enforcement officials, family and friends continued their efforts to locate Brittany to no avail. In 2010, one of Brittany's friends posted a brief on her case in a website chat room stating, *"Any info you have to help us get Britt home safely for Christmas would be great."* Christmas came and went yet Brittany remained among the missing.

On December 5, 2011, two hunters were searching for a deer they shot in a wooded area near the Maryland & Delaware border in Newark, DE. As they searched the woods they stumbled upon human skeletal remains in a shallow clearing. Investigators from the Delaware State Police and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) converged on the scene spending the next two days painstakingly searching the area and gathering evidence. The remains were carefully exhumed and taken to the OCME where they were subjected to extensive examination by a team of forensic pathologists, a forensic odontologist, and a forensic anthropologist. The examination led to a profile being developed which indicated the remains were those of a young adult Caucasoid female with a suggested post-mortem interval of two to three years. This information was compiled into a case file and entered into the NamUs Unidentified Persons database.

Within hours the OCME learned of a potential match between the Brittany Peart case (MP#6905) and our unidentified skeletal remains. The Delaware State Police consulted with the Maryland State Police and learned the case details were promising for a potential match. Brittany's dental records were obtained from the Maryland State Police case file and delivered to the OCME where they were compared to the dentition of the recovered skull. On December 8, 2011, less than seventy-two hours after the recovery, the skeletal remains were forensically identified as those of Brittany Nicole Peart. Law enforcement officials subsequently made notification to Brittany's family and her remains were returned expeditiously. Christmas in 2011 would prove to be bittersweet for the Peart family. Although hope for Brittany's safe return was lost, her family took comfort in knowing that she was finally home.

Law enforcement officials recognized the benefits of utilizing the NamUs system to aid their investigation into the disappearance of Brittany Peart. Their efforts enabled the Delaware OCME and its team of investigators and forensic professionals to bring a successful resolution to this missing and unidentified person case. This case illustrates the importance of partnering with NamUs for the benefit of the missing and unidentified. Many families continue to search for their loved ones and NamUs is a tool that can help bring them home.

Patrick Quigley, D-ABMDI
Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
Georgetown, DE

July 2012 Newsletter Theme:

Mass Fatality Incident Planning, Response and Management

Sharing this information provides an educational opportunity for your colleagues. You can also earn one hour of continuing education towards recertification by submitting an article. The Newsletter Committee will be happy to provide guidance and direction if requested.

Submissions are due by June 15, 2012

Submit to: abmdi@slu.edu

Test Your NamUs Knowledge

1. True/False: NamUs has 3 separate searchable, web-based databases.

2. True/False: The NamUs databases include cases from all over North America, not just the United States.

3. According to Office of Justice Program's (OJP) Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), of the approximately 4,400 unidentified human decedent cases, how many are still unidentified a year later?
a.) 100
b.) 500
c,) 1000
d.) 2200

4. Who can enter a missing person case into NamUs?
a.) Anyone
b.) Law Enforcement
c.) Medical Examiners/Coroner
d.) NamUs Personnel

5. Who can enter an unidentified person into NamUs?
a.) Anyone
b.) Law Enforcement
c.) Medical Examiners/Coroner
d.) NamUs Personnel

6. True/False: NamUs is a duplication of NCIC.

7. How many missing person cases has NamUs aided in closing?
a.) 0
b.) 17
c.) 87
d.) 179

8. How many unidentified person cases has NamUs aided in closing?
a.) 0
b.) 85
c.) 105
d.) 175

Answers on page 15

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Assistance with Entering Cases into NamUs

They say that it takes a village to raise a child. That same saying can be applied to entering unidentified persons cases into the NamUs system. Very rarely does the individual entering the case obtain all the necessary information from just the medical examiner/coroner reports. In addition, as information is being entered into the system, questions may arise regarding NamUs itself. Therefore, it is necessary for medicolegal death investigators to know that help is out there in many forms.

Before any information can actually be entered into NamUs, it must first be located. If the unidentified person is a recent case, this step is usually simple. It is routine in most medical examiner/coroner offices that all forms of possible positive identification are gathered at the time of examination, which. includes facial photographs, photographs of tattoos and other unusual body features, body x-rays, dental x-rays/charting, DNA samples, anthropological analyses, etc. In addition, if any questions arise regarding the unidentified individual, the case is fresh on everyone's mind. It is a different scenario with cases that are 10, 20, or even 30 years old.

With older cases, multiple issues arise. The original medical examiner/coroner case file might be lacking complete documentation. Often the police agency who originally investigated the death will need to be contacted to determine the information available. If the original detective and/ or pathologist are retired, but still in the community, they may need to be contacted for further details regarding the case. The Missing Persons Clearinghouse representative may be quite helpful in providing information about individuals who have been listed as unidentified by law enforcement..

After gathering all available information, the second step is interpreting the information. Forensic science is a discipline that is constantly evolving. What method was used 15 years ago (such as dental charting) may now be completely different.. NamUs has regional forensic odontologists and anthropologists that are available to assist with any case. Information can be sent to them via email, United States Postal Service, UPS, or Fed-Ex. NamUs will pay for the postage. The forensic odontologists and anthropologist can decipher older documents and then upload the information themselves into the NamUs case. If the unidentified individual is partially or completely skeletonized, specific bones (skull, mandible, innominate, etc.) can be sent to these specialists and they will perform an analysis. NamUs again will pay for shipping costs.

After all the documents have been gathered and the information has been interpreted, it is time to enter the case into the NamUs system. No two cases are the same, and different situations create some confusion about protocol. NamUs provides email addresses so you can contact their users with questions or comments. NamUs representatives respond promptly so the case entry is not delayed. Every case entered is reviewed before being uploaded into the system to ensure accurate and thorough information

Entering all of your agency's unidentified persons cases into NamUs can seem like a daunting task. However, assistance is available in every step of the procedure. NamUs is an excellent tool that should be utilized by every medicolegal death investigator. Lack of information about the unidentified individual, confusion about the case, or lack of resources should not prohibit cases from being entered into the NamUs system . Reach out to the village and ask for help!

Jill Haslam, F-ABMDI
Office of the Medical Examiner
Salt Lake City, UT

NM Office of the Medical Investigator NamUs Assisted Identification

Her body was discovered in a vacant field in a small community in New Mexico. Her dress had an attached jeweled brooch; she was wearing sandals, a necklace, and had been dead less than two days. Her eye color was unusual and she had eight dental implants with attached prostheses in her upper and lower jaws; the New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator (OMI) investigators thought this unknown female would be identified quickly.

Three days passed and no missing women were reported in New Mexico or surrounding states in spite of extensive media coverage. An unidentified person NamUs file was initiated on the fifth day after her recovery, which included a retouched postmortem facial image, photos of her jewelry, sandals and fingerprint card, along with a complete dental profile with radiographs showing the dental implants. Regular searches were conducted on the NamUs missing person website, state missing person clearinghouses, NCIC, Doe network, Charley network, all to no avail. Months passed, then a year, but no reports of a missing woman with similar characteristics were found.

DNA samples had been obtained and the decedent's profile was uploaded into CODIS. Having more than $25,000 in dental work in the decedent's mouth, being well dressed, well groomed and having a recognizable face and personal effects all viewable in NamUs, it seemed like she should be identified. She was someone's daughter, sister, mother, aunt or friend.

One and a half years after her demise our office was contacted by a NamUs administrator that a new MP case, just entered into NamUs by a family member had similarities to our unidentified woman. The timeline, demographics and physical description were similar, but no biometric information was available in the decdent's new NamUs file. I made contact with her dentist who provided her dental radiographs electronically and a positive dental identification was made within one day of the initial contact from NamUs.

This woman was from a state adjacent to New Mexico and she had indicated to friends that she was traveling to New Mexico. The family filed a missing report with local law enforcement but little was done to follow up. Neither an NCIC nor NamUs report was completed. The case essentially went cold until the family heard of NamUs and decided to upload the decedent's information into the system.

<u>Lessons learned:</u>

This missing woman could have been identified quickly had she been entered into NamUs, or if law enforcement or family members had checked the NamUs unidentified database using even a cursory search. When the decedent finally was entered into NamUs, she was identified within one day.

The value of the NamUs system is its availability to everyone to view and search for potential identification matches. Law enforcement, the public and medical examiner/coroner offices need to be aware of its capabilities and to use it to input their cases and search for missing persons and unidentified remains.

Peter Loomis, DDS
Office of the Medical Investigator
Albuquerque, MN

2012 Maintenance Fee Notices

2012 Maintenance Fee notices were emailed on 11/02/11 to the email address on file at the ABMDI office. Maintenance fees were **due by March 31, 2012.** Reminder notices were mailed if payment was not received by February 2012.

If you have not yet paid, you are considered *Inactive,* which means that your name will be removed from the ABMDI Website and Directory and you will no longer have access to the list serve or receive the newsletter.

For each year that is unpaid, an additional $20 fee will be assessed to the maintenance fee owed. In order to reactivate your file, you will have to pay all outstanding fees. Recertificaiton will not be possible until all outstanding fees have been paid.

Please make sure that your email address is current. You can download a change of information form from the ABMDI website at http://medschool.slu.edu/abmdi.

ABMDI Certification reaches Pakistan

Dr. Muhammad Umair is the first person from Pakistan to apply and pass the ABMDI Registry certification examination. Dr. Umair discovered ABMDI certification in 2010 while searching the Internet for certification in death investigation He contacted the ABMDI office to inquire about the qualifications and feasibility of applying "because it is . . . the prestigious board of death investigation." After much communication to ensure that Dr. Umair not only qualified for application but could meet the continuing education requirements, he applied for Registry certification.

Pakistan, as with most Asian countries utilizes the continental death investigation system where the investigation and autopsy are the responsibility of the medical officer (doctor) and the criminal investigation is performed by the police.

The Code of Criminal Procedure deals with inquest or inquires into sudden, violent or unnatural deaths and grievous injuries. An inquest is initiated by the magistrate into deaths in police custody and exhumations. A police officer is required to initiate an investigation to determine the cause

Since July 2010, Dr. Umair has been working at three different locations 1) Office of Police Surgeon Karachi where he assists with medicolegal investigations, performs autopsies and exhumations; 2) Dow University of Health Sciences where he supervises post graduate students, and lectures to medical students; and 3) Crime Scene Instructor, Forensic Expert and Advisor for the Development of Biological Evidence Crime Lab at the Forensic Division of Sindh Police. Dr. Umair has compiled a Crime Scene Manual to train police officers and is an Advisor for Development and Expansion of Forensic Capabilities for the Sindh Police.

The ABMDI is excited at becoming an internationally recognized organization.

Did You Know?

- Experts refer to the staggering number of missing and unidentified remains in the United States as a "mass disaster over time." (NamUs, 2011)

- On any given day there are over 100,000 active missing persons cases in the United States. Almost half have a last known contact of over a year ago. (NamUs, 2011)

- A 2007 report of the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicated that medical examiners and coroners held at least 40,000 sets of unidentified remains. This does not include the countless number of remains that are cremated or buried in paupers graves without ever being identified. (NIJ, 2007)

- Of the 40,000 unidentified remains stored in medicolegal death investigations offices only 6,000 or 15% had been entered into NCIC. (NIJ, 2007)

- Nationwide 4,400 unidentified remains are found every year and over 1,000 of these go unidentified after one year. (NamUs, 2011)

- Of those cases entered into NCIC, 25% were known homicides. An additional 25% of those entered are most likely homicide victims. (NIJ, 2007)

- Many cities and counties continue to bury and cremate unidentified decedents without an attempt to retain samples or send for DNA analysis. (NIJ, 2007)

- The Center for Human Identification at the University of North Texas Health Science Center provides free DNA and anthropological testing on found skeletal remains and on the missing persons family and direct reference samples. (CHI, 2012)

- Unidentified remains are entered into NamUs by medical examiners and coroners while data regarding missing persons can be entered by law enforcement professionals, missing person clearinghouses and the general public. (NamUs, 2011)

- Anyone can access the system to search and track cases, print missing person posters, find resources and even map travel routes in an effort to locate missing persons. (NamUs, 2011)

- According to a 2007 report, many of the nation's 17,000 law enforcement agencies don't know about their states missing person's clearinghouse or the four federal databases for missing persons (CODIS, IAFIS, NCIC, ViCAP). Even when aware of these resources many cite a lack of manpower or funding to enter unidentified human remains data. (NIJ, 2007)

- As of November 2011 there are over 8,884 unidentified persons records in NamUs. At the same date there are over 9,032 missing persons records within the NamUs database. (NamUs, 2011)

- Short tandem repeats are short sequences of DNA nucleotides that are repeated numerous times. By looking at a specific area of a chromosome an individual's genetic profile can be created because STR's vary greatly between individuals.

- Nuclear DNA is inherited from both parents. It is found in the nucleus of each cell and is unique to the individual. Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) is found in the mitochondria of a cell. It is inherited from the mother and is not unique. Everyone in the same maternal line will have the same mtDNA for generations.

Useful Links and Numbers

Doe Network
http://www.doenetwork.org

International Association of Cold Case Investigators
Phone number: (918) 409-5026

Medical Examiner and Coroner Brochure on how NamUs can assist
https://www.findthemissing.org/documents/NamUs_ME_C_brochure.pdf

Missing Persons Clearinghouse Lists by State and Region
https://www.findthemissing.org/documents/MPStateClearinghouses.pdf

NamUs
http://namus.gov/

National Association for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
http://www.missingkids.com/
1-800-THE-LOST

Project Edan (No cost forensic artist organization)
http://www.project edan.us/

University of North Texas Center for Human Identification
http://www.unthumanid.org/

Achieving Success through NamUs in Colorado

The NamUs system is used in the Arapahoe County Coroner's Office and most recently, it was used to identify a decedent who was found during the winter in a wooded area with severe decomposition. Personal belongings found at the scene gave a presumptive identification for a known missing person. A couple of months earlier, the decedent's family had placed him in the NamUs system and the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office verified it as an active missing person case. The file was complete with dental and fingerprint information, as well as multiple photographs showing distinct tattoos. When I returned to the office, the NamUs report was printed for the individual and we were able to have him identified shortly thereafter. This saved time for us by not having to track down antemortem dental x-rays and fingerprints. It also allowed the family to be notified that evening that their child was positively identified.

My formal introduction to the NamUs System was in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where I was one of five people in my state of Colorado to attend the NamUs Regional Training Academy. After leaving the training academy, myself and two other members from Team Colorado decided to tackle training others on the system. We developed a presentation that showed benefits from a public, law enforcement and medical examiner/coroner's perspective. This method allowed us to encourage communication between jurisdictions, as well as between the various law enforcement agencies and their local coroner. The Colorado Bureau of Investigations has also jumped on the bandwagon. They have supported our mission by inviting us to be part of their grant-funded training program for cold case investigations that travels all across the state. Every other month we are in a different region of the state, talking with law enforcement, crime scene investigators and coroner staff about the advantages of utilizing the system, and the availability of forensic resources.

Speaking from the public's perspective, Silvia Pettem, author of the forthcoming reference book, Cold Case Research: Resources for Unidentified, Missing and Cold Homicide Cases, starts off the lecture with a case study in which a young woman went missing in Kansas City, Missouri and was later found deceased in Ohio. She was the victim of a violent homicide. Paula Beverly Davis was given her name back after her body lay unidentified in a county-run cemetery for twenty-two years before her sisters found her utilizing the NamUs system.

I lecture on the role of the medical examiner/coroner in entering unidentified cases, both current as well as older cases, and dispel common concerns of law enforcement and medical examiner/coroners. In addition, I discuss recent success stories in which NamUs was utilized that have brought closure to families (including the previously discussed case.)

Lastly, Detective Ron Lopez of the Colorado Springs Police Department discusses how to build a strong missing persons file in the NamUs system, and how he spearheaded a new missing persons unit. The new unit, with the assistance of NamUs, has cleared approximately 75% of the previously open cold missing person cases. Additionally, Detective Lopez discusses how he archives previously entered missing person cases in which the individuals have been found in case they go missing again(especially with individuals who lead a high-risk lifestyle.)

The Colorado Bureau of Investigations has dedicated resources to load all of the unsolved homicides, missing persons, and unidentified bodies in their public database into the NamUs system. They also take the time to go back and gather more information to improve the cases that are in the system in order to increase the odds of finding a resolution.

From the medical examiner/coroner side, we have found success in addressing the benefits to the rural coroners in Colorado. Many of these rural coroners have very small budgets to work with each year and lack the resources of the larger coroner/medical examiner offices in the state. As more and more law enforcement agencies and coroner/medical examiners enter their cases, there will be many more success stories. Feel free to contact any of the three of us if you have questions about our presentation or how we help various agencies. Additionally, Detective Lopez is a great resource if your local law enforcement agency needs help getting started with addressing the way it handles missing person cases.

Matthew M. Lunn, F-ABMDI
Araphaoe County Coroner's Office
Centennial, CO

Continuing Education Opportunities

Medicolegal Investigation of Death
Wayne State University
May 2—4, 2012
Dearborn, MI
www.med.wayne.edu/cme/mld or dcme@med.wayne.edu
Approved for 16.5 hours of CME

Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Child and Elder Abuse. . .from Scene to Courtroom
5th Annual Forensic investigations Conference
St. Luke's Health System
Kansas City, MO
May 8—9, 2012
https://www.saintlukeshealthsystem.org/forensic-investigations-conference
Approved for POST continuing education

Advanced Death Investigation Seminar
New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator
Albuquerque, NM
June 8, 2012
Contact ygomez@salud.unm.edu
Approved for 8 hours of ABMDI continuing education

International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiner's Annual Conference
June 24 - 29, 2012
Las Vegas, NV
www.theiacme.com
Approved for 25 POST hours

Medicolegal Death Investigator Training Course
Saint Louis University
School of Medicine
St. Louis, MO
August 6—10, 2012
http://medschool.slu.edu/mldi
Scholarships are available!
Approved for 33 hours of ABMDI continuing education

Continuing Education for Forensic Professionals
2012 Summer Conference sponsored by West Virginia Univ
Aug 22—27, 2012
Jacksonhole, WY
Approved for maximum of 39 hours of ABMDI cont ed

National Association of Medical Examiners Annual Meeting
October 5—9, 2012
Baltimore, MD
thename.org
Approved for continuing medical education (AMA)

Surface Skeleton and Buried Body Recovery Seminar
November 28—30, 2012
Peoria, AZ
http://www.drfulgi.com/skulldivers_2.html
Approved for 24 hours of POST continuing education

Free Online Training sponsored by NIJ:

Death Investigation of the Elderly
RTI Forensic Science Education
https://www.forensiced/org/training/alltraining.cfm.
Approved for 1.5 hours of AMA

Forensic Science: An Overview for Medicolegal Death Investigators
National Forensic Science Technology Center
http://www.nfstc.org/registration-now-open-for-medicolegal-death-investigation-training
Available April—September 2012
Approved for 16 hours of continuing education

Sudden, Unexplained Infant Death Investigation: An Overview and Top 25 Critical Points to Consider
RTI Forensic Science Education
https://www.forensiced.org/training/alltraining.cfm
Approved for 1.0 CME

Identifying the Unidentified

While nobody would ever mistake Lehigh County, Pennsylvania for Ellis Island, Allentown is the largest city in the county and third largest in the state. It is its own melting pot. Centered almost half way between New York City and Philadelphia, the county is home to a diverse population and a large number of transients, including two regional trauma centers. The Lehigh County Coroner's Office is frequently tasked with extensive searches for next of kin and occasionally an unidentified decedent that requires cooperative efforts between the coroner's office and law enforcement. The following case proved to be one of the most difficult for identification of the decedent.

In late October the county experienced a rare and severe snowstorm, which it was not prepared for. The deciduous trees were still ripe with leaves and the 6-10 inches of wet, heavy snow proved too much, causing downed limbs and power lines. On November 1, 2011, a municipal worker for South Whitehall Township was performing storm clean-up in a remote, rural portion of the township and smelled something burning. After investigating, he found what appeared to be a burned body and notified the township police. When the police arrived, they confirmed that the remains were a body and notified the coroner's office.

The remains had extensive thermal trauma making visual identification impossible. There were no personal items found at the scene to help with identification. The scene was processed by police, detectives from the County District Attorney's office, and the coroner's office. Evidence was collected and the remains were moved to the morgue. On a more detailed exam at the morgue, a defect to the chest was noted and x-rays confirmed a fragmented projectile in the chest. Additional x-rays confirmed the presence of dental work but no surgically implanted devices. Unfortunately, there were no other findings that could assist with identification. The only known information at this point was that that the remains were of a white male between the ages of 18 and 30, weight between 160 and 170lbs and height between 6'1" and 6'3."

An autopsy the following day determined the cause of death to be gunshot wound to chest. The decedent's carboxyhemoglobin was 5.5%, which would be consistent for someone who was not exposed to smoke or combustibles. The forensic pathologist determined that the diffuse thermal trauma was post-mortem. To further complicate attempts at identification, there was thermal amputation of the right upper extremity and extensive thermal trauma to the left hand. The left hand was removed during autopsy in an attempt to obtain fingerprints and the jaw was removed for documentation by the forensic odontologist. The manner of death was ruled to be a homicide.

The process of identification proved to be timely. Law enforcement assisted by sending a brief message to NCIC with the basic description hoping to attract the attention of a department which may have a missing person. The left hand was rehydrated and several methods were used in an attempt to obtain at least one acceptable fingerprint. Several methods were utilized to obtain prints, but they were of poor quality. They were submitted to AFIS with negative results. The jaws were turned over to our forensic odontologist for charting, in anticipation of entering the information into NamUs and NCIC. LeHigh County Coroner's office, in conjunction with the District Attorney's office, released a joint media statement about the death; giving the description as well as requesting the public's help in identifying the decedent. After this type of release, the coroner's office generally receives numerous calls from the public within the first 24 hours but unfortunately, this time only a few calls were received and the missing were located.

Photographs of the decedent were given to a state trooper who had experience with forensic sketches The trooper was able to create a sketch which included a front view and profile that was released to law enforcement agencies and the public. The response from this release was again minimal but had received attention from other law enforcement agencies across the country.

Another resource utilized by investigators were websites for missing or unidentified persons, as well as social media outlets. Websites included www.doenetwork.org, www.charleyproject.org, www.pennsylvaniamissing.com and www.someoneismissing.com were searched for anyone who might match the description. Even Facebook was searched for member made pages or groups for missing persons. Ironically, it was later discovered that the decedent had a Facebook group made by friends and family who were searching for him. Unfortunately, because the search results

Cont'd on page 13

Cont'd from page 12

were so random, the only way it was discovered was by searching his name specifically. The coroner's office also decided to submit blood and bone marrow samples to a private DNA laboratory for a profile to enter into CODIS.

Three weeks into the investigation revealed no positive results. There were continuous meetings and emails between the coroner's office, local law enforcement and the District Attorney's office with constant sharing of information. Dr. Richard Scanlin, a regional forensic ondologist for NamUs, was contacted for guidance. Dr. Scanlon was familiar with the case, as he was consulted by another forensic odontologist for assistance with comparisons for one of the "prospective decedents". Dr. Scanlon was able to provide information on completing the reports, as well as valuable insight. This proved to be most helpful, as no one in the coroner's office had prior experience with NamUs or the NCIC Unidentified Report.

Further stumbling blocks occurred throughout the investigation. As it is the coroner's responsibility to identify the decedent, the office compiled information for the NCIC Unidentified Person Initial Entry report. The state police assisted in entering information. Since the coroner's office does not have an Originating Agency Identifier (ORI) number, the case was entered under the authority of local law enforcement. That meant that any results would be filtered back to the police department and not to the coroner's office. NamUs accepted much of the same information as NCIC, but it also accepted quite a bit more, including photographs of the area and sketches. The entry was submitted to NamUs, reviewed and approved.

Due to the DNA profile not being processed by a law enforcement or a government sanctioned lab, the DNA profile was not accepted by CODIS because the lab has not yet been approved by CODIS to submit profiles.

Approximately one month later, the family of a missing person from a neighboring state contacted detectives from the District Attorney's office. The missing person was reported on October 31, 2011.

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A friend of the family discovered a sketch and looked online for further information. Based on the information provided, the coroner's office contacted the missing person's dentist to obtain dental records. Although the records were consistent with the decedent, a positive identification could not be confirmed. The family provided a DNA sample for comparison.

On December 22, 2011, the decedent was positively identified and the family was notified. The homicide investigation is still in progress.

The success in identifying the decedent depended on several factors. First and foremost, all agencies cooperated and communicated during the investigation. The investigation spanned several states and had it not been for the willingness to share information, there would have been delays in reuniting the decedent with his family.

It's important to recognize when assistance is needed and then to seek that assistance. The coroner's office had no prior experience entering cases into NamUs or NCIC. Dr. Scanlon's experience as a forensic odontologist consultant with the NamUs system allowed timely entry of accurate information.

Lastly, the experience prompted the coroner's office to update and develop policies and procedures on handling unidentified decedents cases. Timely entry of cases into NamUs encourages prompt resolution for the next of kin.

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Eric D. Minnich, D-ABMDI
First Deputy Coroner/
Operations Manager
Lehigh County Coroner's Office
Allentown, PA

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Featured ABMDI Certificants

Terry Coker and Wendy Honeyfield are Senior Deputy Medical Investigators at the New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator. They both have a strong interest and talent for getting decedents identified. Mr. Coker has been with the office for twenty-seven years, and he has investigated approximately 13,000 deaths. His specialty is the ability to get prints from decomposed and mummified remains, and he has on several occasions been able to get prints from cases that were over 90% skeletonized. He soaks fingers in a formula that he created many years ago and spends hours working with them to make them pliable enough to get a good print. His formula is a well-guarded secret, and he is legendary among law enforcement throughout the state. He is also responsible for obtaining and submitting skeletal samples for DNA extraction and entry into CODIS.

Ms. Honeyfield has worked at the office for the past thirteen years. Her work is primarily focused on the oversight and quality assurance of grant work, such as the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS), however, she also spends much of her time gathering missing person reports and comparing them to our unidentified individuals. Two years ago, she began reviewing and reinvestigating old unidentified cases with the plan to enter them into NamUs. She discovered that many of the cases had good quality fingerprints that were submitted to the FBI and local law enforcement around the time of death, but they did not get a match. She resent prints to the FBI on thirty cases, some as old as 1994, and was able to get thirteen of them identified. The families were notified, and they were able to have some closure knowing what happened to their loved ones.

Hard work, dedication and the ability to approach problems from different angles helps the office maintain a 99% identification rate year after year.

Test Your NamUs Knowledge Answers

1. **Answer: True**

Missing Persons: www.findthemissing.gov
Unclaimed Remains: www.claimus.org
Unidentified Remains: www.identifyus.gov

2. **Answer: False**

The Office of Justice Program's (OJP) National Institute of Justice (NIJ) began funding major efforts to maximize the use of DNA technology in our criminal justice system. Much of NIJ's work has focused on developing tools to investigate and solve the cases of missing persons and unidentified decedents within the United States. For those states sharing borders with Canada, the Canadian government has a similar searchable, web-based database: http://www.missing-u.ca/Default.aspx

Additional resources:

Listing of Missing Persons for the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Jalisco, and Colima
http://www.tomzap.com/missing.html

Missing Persons | Embassy of the United States Mexico City, Mexico

http://mexico.usembassy.gov/eng/eacs_locating.html

International Missing Persons Directory
http://www.unidentified-persons.org/pg10.html

3. **Answer: c.**

In June 2007, OJP's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), confirmed that, in a typical year, medical examiners and coroners handle approximately 4,400 unidentified human decedent cases, 1,000 of which remain unidentified after one year. (See the Medical Examiners and Coroners' Offices, 2004 for the full report.) (http://www.namus.gov/)

4. **Answer: a.**

"Anyone can enter a case, after becoming a registered NamUs user. The case will be verified as an active missing persons case with law enforcement prior to information being published on the site. A National Crime Information Center (NCIC) number or law enforcement case number must be in place before the case is published on the NamUs site (both are preferred). The NCIC number is an official law enforcement tracking number for a missing persons report and can be obtained through a law enforcement agency. These steps are taken to ensure data quality as well as to prevent fraudulent use of the site." (www.findthemissing.com)

5. **Answer: c.**

Only registered and authorized medical examiners and coroners, or an official agent acting on their behalf, may enter case information in the UP system.

6. **Answer: False**

The systems have different objectives. NCIC (National Crime Information Center) is a computerized database of documented criminal justice information accessible only to law enforcement agencies and their subgroups. NamUs is a searchable, online database that serves as a national repository for case information on missing persons and unidentified remains. It can be accessed by anyone including the general public, law enforcement and state and local agencies that are not part of law enforcement such as a county medical examiner. It is designed to facilitate the work of the diverse community of individuals and organizations who investigate missing and unidentified persons.(www.findthmissing.com)

7. **Answer: d**

MP Case Breakdown

Total Cases:	10088
Open Cases:	7349 - 72.84%
Closed Cases:	2739 - 27.15%
NamUs Aided:	179 - 6.53%

As of 03/19/12
https://findthemissing.gov

8. **Answer: b**

UP Case Breakdown

Total Cases:	8884
Open Cases:	8289 - 93.30%
Closed Cases:	595 - 6.69%
NamUs Aided:	85 - 14.28%

As of 03/19/12
https://identifyus.org

Best Practices: The Narrative Report

Inexperienced medicolegal death investigators have little time to focus on the minutiae of narrative report writing. Instead, they have to concentrate on learning their agency's report format and the information required for each type of case (the content.) After achieving competency in these areas, investigators should continue to develop their report writing skills. Unfortunately, the existing medicolegal death investigation literature provides inadequate coverage of this topic. However, an abundance of criminal justice literature covers police report writing. Investigators may find these references useful, especially the discussions of the fundamental qualities of a competent report. Clarity, conciseness, and objectivity are three of the pillars of a competent report. By adopting the following guidelines, the quality of your investigative reports will improve.

Objectivity is arguably the most important quality of an investigative report, yet it is difficult to fully achieve. Even with our best effort to separate fact from opinion, subjectivity can be overlooked as certain words or phrases carry unfair or unintended meaning. Biased words, like *alleged*, *claimed*, and *reportedly* imply that the investigator doesn't believe a witness's statement. Connotative words like *victim, trash* or *poor* may have an emotional impact on the reader. The term victim should never be used as it presumes that the manner of death will be an accident or homicide. Another term to avoid is motor vehicle *accident*. As an alternative, use *collision* because accident suggests an unintended or unplanned incident and some collisions could be suicidal in nature. To obtain objectivity, a medicolegal death investigator should use conservative language that is both explicit and impartial.

Conciseness is a desirable quality in investigative reports. To achieve conciseness, investigators should omit unnecessary words and avoid using jargon or overly technical terms (PLAIN, 2011). When reviewing reports, fit's common to find unnecessary modifiers. A grammatical modifier is a "word or phrase that adds detail or description to a sentence" (Brizee & Wells, 2009). Modifiers are adjectives and adverbs that add interest to the content. Common examples extracted from reports include; *apparent, just, fairly, only, often, shortly, nearly, very,* and *highly*. Not only are modifiers unnecessary, they insert subjectivity into the report. Another way to achieve concise reports is to avoid redundancy. The following examples of redundancy came from actual reports: A total of 9 gunshot wounds (*A total of* is unnecessary), close proximity to his arm, small in size, actively burning fire, and spinal vertebrae. Some redundant phrases are sneaky, so proofread reports carefully.

Most report writing references discourage the use of jargon or technical terms in the narrative. Technical terms tend to be longer words and this opposes the goal of conciseness. However, medicolegal death investigators have to incorporate terminology from forensic science, medicine, and law, and these disciplines use the most technical terms. Thusly, an investigator must attempt to balance their report with technical and layman's terms. When recording observations, refrain from using terms like *hemorrhage, desiccation* or *putrefaction,* when bleeding, drying, or decomposing are easier to understand. Whichever term are used, be consistent, and don't vacillate between technical and generic, like *contusion* and *bruise*. It is the overuse of technical terms that should be discouraged.

The investigative narrative should be recorded with sentences that use active voice rather than passive. When using active voice, "the subject of the sentence performs the action expressed in the verb. In a sentence using passive voice, the subject is acted upon…" (Angeli, Brizee, & Toadvine, 2011). Sentences written in active voice are usually shorter and easier to understand than passive ones. Take the following example:

- Passive: The decedent was struck by a pickup truck.
- Active: A pickup truck struck the decedent.

In this example, the verb is *struck* and the pickup performed the action. Both sentences convey the same meaning, but the active sentence uses fewer words. Here's another example:

- Passive: A suicide note was found on the kitchen table.
- Active: Officer Jones found a suicide note on the kitchen table.

In this example, *was found* is the compound verb, but no person or thing performed the action. The sentence written in active voice clarifies "who did what". Active voice is important when describing the events of the terminal episode as these circumstances tend to be action oriented. Limit the use of passive voice and your reports will be clear and concise.

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An investigative narrative must meet the information needs of the medical examiner/coroner, the next-of-kin and the legal system. To do so, reports must be objective, concise, and use active voice. When reviewing reports, look for unnecessary modifiers and biased or connotative words. Additionally, try to balance the use of technical and generic terms. "Layman's terms" tend to be shorter and easily understood by the public. Lastly, the investigator should structure sentences using active voice. By doing this, the report will show the audience *who did what*. Focus on word choice and sentence structure and your reports will be clear, concise, and competent.

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